

Remarks in a Town Meeting in Cranston, Rhode Island May 9, 1994

The President. Thank you very much. First, thank you, Doug and Ginger, and thank you, ladies and gentlemen, for coming. And I want to thank the people in New Haven and Springfield.

We only have an hour tonight; we're not going to have any breaks. So I'm going to give a very brief opening statement about the problems presented by our health care system in America today and briefly what we propose to do about it.

There is a crisis in health care. During any given time in the year there will be a total of 58 million Americans without any health insurance. There are 81 million Americans—out of a population of 255 million—in families with preexisting conditions, that is, someone in the family has been ill, which means they either don't have insurance, they pay much more for their insurance, or they can never change their jobs because they would lose insurance if they changed jobs. It's a huge problem.

One hundred and thirty-three million Americans, or three out of four Americans with private health insurance, have insurance policies with lifetime limits, which means they can outrun their limits if they have someone in their family really sick. In addition to that, the costs of the Government health program, Medicare and Medicaid, are going up at roughly 3 times the rate of inflation and threaten to undermine all of our efforts to bring the deficit down. It's a very serious problem.

And one more thing, even though we have this many people, 58 million, who are without insurance, our country spends a higher percentage of its income on health care, 40 percent more, than any other country in the world. Yet we are the only major country that hasn't been able to figure out how to give insurance to everybody.

If we want to cover everyone, if we believe everybody should have health insurance, you either have to have a Government-funded program, that is, Medicare is a Government-funded program or a program like the Canadians have, or you have to guarantee private insurance to everybody. There aren't any other options.

I favor a program of guaranteed private insurance to the employed uninsured because that's what we have for most everybody else. Nine out of ten people in this country with private insurance are insured through the workplace. Eight out of ten Americans without insurance are in a family with at least one worker. So I favor guaranteed private insurance with good benefits—including primary and preventive care and mental health benefits and alcohol and drug abuse benefits, because all these things will save us money over the long run—no lifetime limits, and insurance that can't be taken away.

Under our plan, we would preserve the choice of physicians, something that is rapidly disappearing today with the growth of managed-care networks. More and more people are losing the right to choose their doctors, actually being forced to give up their family doctors and go to someone else. So under our plan, every American every year would have the opportunity to choose from at least three different plans in which they choose the doctor, choose a high-quality plan. Employers wouldn't pick the plan, the employees would. And insurance companies couldn't deny anybody coverage.

To deal with the problems I mentioned up at the beginning of this talk, it would be illegal to drop coverage or cut benefits, increase rates for people who had someone in their family who'd been sick, use lifetime limits to cut off benefits, or charge older workers more than younger ones. I hope we'll get to talk about that more in a minute. Some younger workers are upset about that, but I'm convinced it's the right choice for our country. And I hope we get a chance to talk about it.

Our plan would preserve Medicare as it is but would add to Medicare prescription drug benefits and phase in long-term care benefits. I think that's quite important because a lot of people on Medicare don't get the drugs they need, with the result that hospitalizations are more frequent and the program actually costs more and keeps people less healthy than would be the case otherwise.

I favor guaranteeing these health benefits at work, with employers and employees bearing a portion of the contribution, in more or less the

ratio they do with major companies today but with discounts to small businesses who couldn't afford it otherwise. And the Government would help with the unemployed.

The last chart I turned over is just a summary of what I said. *[Laughter]*

So that's how the program would work: universal guaranteed private insurance; maintain the choice of doctors; leave Medicare the way it is; require employers and employees who don't cover now to take up their own coverage, but provide discounts for small businesses; the Government would have a pool to pay for the discounts and to cover the unemployed, uninsured; add prescription drugs; and phase in a long-term care benefit for the elderly people on Medicare and for the disabled, which I think is quite important.

Now, I hope we can flesh it out, but I don't want to talk anymore. Let's go to questions.

Health Care Reform

[At this point, moderator Doug White introduced the first participant, who asked if the new health care plan could focus only on people currently uninsured and if health care professionals could donate one percent of their time to provide care to that group.]

The President. Let me try to answer your first question and then your second question. First of all, somewhere around 15 percent are not insured. But the problem is more serious than that in two ways. A whole lot of people, principally folks who work for smaller business, have very limited insurance, that is, very high deductibles or copays or limited benefits. And an enormous number of people are at risk of losing their insurance, so that we are actually adding to the pool of permanently uninsured people about 100,000 people a month.

Therefore, we are going to leave a lot of people alone. There will be a lot of people, for example, who will keep the same benefits that they have. If they have the same or better benefits or their employers pay the same or bigger contribution, they'll be left alone. And that's a huge number of people. So there will be an awful lot of people that won't be affected by that in that sense.

But we have to set up a system that stops this hemorrhaging and gives small businesses and self-employed people the right to buy insurance on the same terms that big business and

Government can. So I think that's an answer to that.

With regard to your other question, the truth is that most doctors and hospitals contribute far more than one percent of their time and earnings now because when people don't have insurance, they do eventually get health care. But they get it when they're too sick and they show up at the emergency room; they get wildly expensive care. And then they either absorb it, that is, the doctors, the nurses, the hospitals either eat it, or they pass it along to all the rest of you, so you wind up paying more than you otherwise would for your own health care because others don't do it.

But I think that basically, we are going to leave as many people alone as we can while trying to minimize the chance that anyone can ever lose their insurance again.

[A participant with an artificial limb asked if she would receive the same quality care under the plan, even if she happened to lose her job.]

The President. First of all, this health care plan will not take away from you any benefit you now have.

Q. Okay.

The President. So if you keep working for the State and you have this option, you can keep it. Secondly—they say I don't have the microphone high enough. Usually they tell me not to hold it so high. *[Laughter]* The second thing is, the choice you have of your provider is something we are trying to protect. I know that's a hot issue in one of your political races here. What I want to say to you is that more and more and more Americans are losing their right to choose their doctors right now, as employers decide on managed care plans to hold down costs. A lot of people who work for these employers are having to move into the managed care plan, and their doctors are not enrolled in the plan, or their suppliers, and so they lose their choice.

Under our plan, even if you change jobs—so you went to work, let's say, for a small business—every year, you would have the right every year to choose from a minimum of three plans, one of which would guarantee you the right to choose any provider you wanted. You might have to pay a little bit more for it than you would otherwise pay, but you would always have that right, and your employer would always

have to make a major contribution to your health care.

Q. Maybe I'll move to the White House next. [Laughter]

The President. Thank you. It would suit me just fine. I'd like to have somebody like you working for me.

Anticrime Efforts

[A student asked about guns and drugs in schools.]

The President. Thank you very much for your question. First, let me say, this young man has asked maybe the most important question in America today, but he's also asked a health care question. So I'll give you one line on the health care implications of this and come back and answer his question.

Why is it a health care question? Because one reason we pay more for health care than any other country is we have more kids getting shot and cut up and showing up at the emergency room, imposing enormous costs on this system. We have the highest rate of childhood violence and killing of any of the major countries in the world. It's a big issue.

Here's what we're doing. We are in the process of passing a crime bill which will do the following things, and it should be passed, now, in a few weeks: First, it will ban 19 assault weapons, the purpose of which is only to kill people, not to hunt. Second, it will make it illegal for minors to own or possess handguns, except under the supervision of an approved adult for an approved purpose. Third, it will provide funds to schools that have high levels of violence to set up things like metal detectors and do other things to make children more secure in the schools. The fourth thing it will do, and this is where you come in—you asked your question. The fourth thing it will do is to provide funds to schools and States throughout the country to teach young people ways to resolve their differences and deal with their anger and their frustration, short of resorting to violence. Because a lot of our kids are growing up in troubled families, are not taught how to do this. And a lot of young people don't think about the future, they just lash out and hurt people.

So all these things are in this crime bill. I think they're very, very important. We're also going to provide for more police officers on

our street who can work with young people, work in the schools and go into schools and do things like the D.A.R.E. program, the drug education programs to try to keep drugs out of the schools. But I think all of these things will really make a difference.

Now, what can you do about it? We can pass all these programs, and unless every school in this country has committed young people and committed parents trying to keep the drugs out and the violence out and the guns out, it's going to be hard for us to succeed. So we're going to give you the tools to do it, and then you have to organize, school by school, to get it done. I'll do my part, and I want you to do yours.

Doug White. Do you think you can remember all that? [Laughter]

The President. Sure you can.

Q. I think so.

The President. Get the assault weapons off, take the handguns away from the kids, metal detectors and other security devices at schools, teach kids nonviolent ways to resolve their differences, and organize every school.

Education

[Moderator Ginger Casey introduced a participant in New Haven, CT, who asked about racial balance in schools.]

The President. Well, I think that racially balanced schools or racially diverse schools are good for the students. And in terms of how that is done, that's really a question to be resolved on a State-by-State basis. But one of the things we have tried to do at the national level is to change the school funding formula for Federal aid so that we give relatively more money to the schools that have a larger number of low-income children. And very often that means a more racially diverse population. That is about all we can do at the national level, besides enforcing the civil rights laws, which I intend to do very vigorously.

But I think in every State, since we live in a country that is so multiracial and multicultural, it is better if children go to school with people of all different racial and ethnic backgrounds. And I think we should support that so we can learn to live together and work together.

Anticrime Efforts

[A participant from Salem, CT, suggested criminal control rather than gun control.]

The President. Well, we already have the highest percentage of people in prison of any country in the world. And our crime bill gives more money to the States to build even more prisons. It also stiffens penalties. It has a “three strikes and you’re out” provision to deal with people who are very dangerous but are fortunate enough to commit crimes where their victims aren’t hurt so bad. If they do three violent crimes in a row, they’d still be getting a life sentence, ineligible for parole under Federal law. I favor tougher punishment, and I favor keeping serious criminals in prison longer. But you have to do other things as well.

There is no question that one of the reasons we have a higher death rate is, in the last several years, if you just look at it, is the average victim of a gunshot incident today outside the home has more bullets in him or her than was the case 10 or 15 years ago. And that’s why I think we did the right thing to go after the assault weapon. But I also believe we should have tougher punishment and focus that punishment on the serious repeat offenders.

Health Care Reform

[A participant asked if inner-city hospitals would be adequately compensated under the new plan.]

The President. The short answer, Sister, is yes. And that’s one of the reasons that the Catholic hospital network has been so supportive of what we have been trying to do and has worked very closely with my wife and with me as we’ve tried to put this program together.

But let me explain precisely what the issue is. There are an awful lot of people who are uninsured or underinsured in the inner cities. Under our program, every person who comes through your doors will be a source of reimbursement, that is, you will get reimbursed for the care you give. And it will make a huge difference in time to help keep some of our inner-city hospitals open, many of which have been closing at an alarming rate, leaving nothing left.

It’s gotten to the point where some of our inner-city areas, there’s almost the same access-to-health-care problem that you have in rural

parts of my State or in the High Plains in the country.

Juvenile Offenders

[Mr. White discussed the impending release of a juvenile murderer in Rhode Island on his 21st birthday. He then introduced a participant who questioned the fact that a juvenile criminal record would not prevent a handgun purchase under the Brady law.]

The President. Yes, I heard about it. The people of this State are very upset about this. I mean, I had that—I don’t know—3,000 or so people out at the airport to meet me, and I was just working through the crowd and literally a dozen people mentioned this case to me.

Let me say, first of all, I care a lot about this. My first job in public life was as an attorney general in my State, dealing with criminal procedures. Then I was Governor, and I had to enforce the criminal laws in my State, including the capital punishment law. Most States, years ago, before juvenile crime was the problem it is now, had laws which basically said you couldn’t be charged as an adult until you reached a certain age. Many times it was 15 or 16, sometimes more, sometimes earlier. And if you were tried as a juvenile, you had to be released either when you became 18 or 21, and your records would be sealed. You’d sort of be given a new chance. That was before. When these laws were passed, you didn’t have teenagers going around gunning people down like you do now. Now, I think you have two or three options.

First of all, on this particular case, one thing the State of Rhode Island could do is to pass a law which says that the records of juveniles would not be sealed as it relates to questions under the Brady bill; that is, have you ever been treated for mental illness, have you ever committed a felony or what would have been a felony if you had been an adult? And the State legislature could simply change that law for that purpose and then put those records in. And then the gun store owners and all gun sellers would then be obligated to check that record and not sell a gun to that young man, just like they would be under anybody convicted of a crime as an adult.

The second thing I want to say is, I do not know about the constitutionality of this, but another thing you could do is to say, if you want

the benefit of the State's juvenile law when you could have been prosecuted as an adult—and if you have a law which permits 15-year-olds to be prosecuted as an adult—you have to be willing to voluntarily undergo psychiatric treatment and get some sort of approval before you are released.

Now, those are two things that I would think you ought to consider. But I know on terms of getting—being eligible to buy a gun, you could change that law tomorrow and apply it to this case and this young man and all other people similarly situated. At least you'd have that protection.

Those are my best ideas. I think it's an outrageous thing that this kid could get out—apparently has refused all treatment—get out and buy a gun. I think it's wrong.

Q. I agree with you there. I would like to let you have this because this is an article that was written, and it will give you a little bit more on the case.

The President. Thank you.

Q. He slaughtered two women and two babies and—

The President. Well, I've given you my best ideas. And I think it's terrible. And yes, my eyebrows are raised, and my temperature is hot.

You ought to fix that gun thing. You can do that. I think you can do that, and I hope you will.

Arkansas Record and Health Care Reform

Q. Mr. President, the Providence Journal recently published a report comparing the States on livability and health care. Rhode Island placed near the top, Arkansas, the bottom. I'm worried. Are you going to do for us what you did for Arkansas?

The President. Do you think that's a fair question? I mean, is that a fair question? Of course not, right?

My State, at the end of World War II, had a per capita income that was 56 percent of the national average. While I was Governor, the last 6 years, we had a job growth rate higher than the national average. Our per capita income increased higher than the national average. We were nationally recognized for education reforms, for welfare reforms, for dramatic improvement. You should judge people based on where they started; now, that's a fair question. That sounds like the kind of thing that President Bush said to me in the campaign.

And I also extended health care benefits to more pregnant women, more little children, improved health care to elderly people—those are things that I did do—and maintained taxes at the same percentage of income of my State when I left office as they were when I took office.

So I think I did a pretty good job as Governor. And by the way, my fellow Governors, including the Governors of New England, once voted me the best Governor in the country. So I did the best I could.

Now, having said that, I did not revolutionize the economy, wipe out all poverty, and end all problems. I plead guilty. But what I did do is just what I'm trying to do as President, which is to fix things.

Now, what you have to decide is whether you think it is acceptable for the United States to continue to be the only advanced country in the world that cannot figure out how to give insurance to all of its people, whether it is acceptable for us to spend 14½ percent of our income on health care. No other country spends over 10 percent. Germany and Japan spend under 9 percent; they cover everybody, and we don't. We have to decide whether this is acceptable. Why does it happen? Because we spend so much more on insurance and paperwork and other things. That, to me, cannot be justified.

And if we want to go on like we are, where more and more people lose their right to choose their doctor every year, more and more people are finding themselves uninsured, we can. Otherwise, we should decide what we're going to do about it and how we're going to do it.

I don't pretend for a moment to have all the answers. All I can tell you is that I've done my best to find them with the help of a lot of brilliant people, most of them, by the way, from your part of the country, not from mine. They came up with the plan. We've worked very hard on it. But I think what we need to do is to talk about how we can solve this problem. That's what I've been in the business of doing all my life.

The Economy

Ginger Casey. President Clinton, do you feel, though, that the economy has turned around for working class people in this country?

The President. Oh, I think the economy has plainly turned around. It hasn't done as much as it should, but let me just give you some

facts. Last month we had 267,000 new jobs come into this economy; in the first 4 months of this year, a million jobs; in the first 15 months of our administration, 3 million jobs. Rhode Island had 8,000 new jobs this year, the first time in 4 years you've had any job growth. So it's beginning to turn around.

We have driven the deficit down. And if my budget is adopted this year, we will have the first time since 1969 that we've got a decrease in domestic spending, except for health care, which is going up. And we'll have 3 years of deficit reduction in a row for the first time since Harry Truman was President. So I'm doing the best I can to turn it around.

But what we need to do is to get everybody in a room together—Senator Chafee's got a health care bill, and we've got other health care bills—we need to find out how can we cover everybody, how can we hold the cost down, and how can we solve the problems of the country. I don't pretend to have all the answers, but I do intend to keep the same can-do spirit as President that I brought to the Governor's office. And I'm still pretty proud of it. And I think most of the folks at home think that way, too.

Child Care

[A participant in Springfield, MA, asked about the availability of quality child care.]

The President. Well, let me just mention a couple of things. We have focused our child care efforts basically on trying to increase the incomes of working parents with modest incomes. This year, one in six American taxpayers will be eligible for an income tax cut because they are working for very modest incomes, hovering just modestly above the poverty line, and it's hard for them to be successful parents and successful workers. So we're focusing on that.

In our welfare reform bill, we plan to also do more to try to help parents with modest incomes afford their child care. Beyond that, of course, there is the Federal child care tax credit, and most States do the same thing.

Have we done as much as we should? I don't think so. But I think if we can help cover the health care expenses of all working parents and their children and help to deal with the income tax structure, I think that would go a long way toward helping you afford child care. And we're

doing as much as we can with the money we have.

Reaction to Criticism

[A participant in Massachusetts asked if the President and his family were being held to a higher standard than their predecessors.]

The President. Well, I think I've been subject to more assault—[laughter]—than any previous President, based on the evidence. But the Vice President said a few days ago that there are powerful forces in this country who basically resent the way the last election came out, so they keep trying to undo it and pretend it didn't happen. But we'll have an election in 1996, and I wish that we could just all settle down and be Americans for a while and work on our problems, and then evaluate me based on the job I do and let—people will have a chance to make another decision. But I think that the constant politics of diversion and division and destruction is not good for America, but I'm prepared to live with it and keep working. So far, it has not interfered with the progress and the record of the Congress and the work we're trying to do for the country. And as long as I can keep it from interfering with it, I can live with it if you can.

Anticrime Efforts

[A participant asked about the use of probation and parole and then asked if the President could speak Spanish.]

The President. Let me answer the second question, first. I don't. [Laughter] I wish I did, and I probably ought to. And I think before too long, nearly every American President will be expected to, not only because of the high percentage of Hispanic-Americans we have but because of our increasing ties and our common future with Central and South America.

One of the things that I'm quite proud of is that we're going to host a Summit of the Americas in the United States in December. And there are 33 democracies in Latin America, one democracy where the President's been kicked out by dictators, military dictators—that's Haiti—and one Communist country, Cuba. That's a wonderful record.

What was the first question you asked? What was the first question? Oh, the overcrowding of the prisons. I think there should be more probation and parole. Let me say what our

crime bill does. Our crime bill funds more prison places to keep serious offenders in prison but also gives States the flexibility to use some of these monies to keep the nonviolent offenders out of prison with legitimate probation programs and diversion programs like boot camps and other kinds of programs.

I think the lady a moment ago from Connecticut asked the question about shouldn't we keep serious offenders in prison longer. It will be easier if we draw reasonable distinctions between who should not be in and who should be in, so that those who should be in can be kept longer. I think probation is an important part of that.

But as this young man can tell you, since he works in the program, if you want a probation program, you have to pay to have a good one; otherwise, it's just a joke. You can't let it be a joke; you've got to actually invest in one that works. And it's cheaper than prison.

Global Trade

[A participant asked what could be done to help the failing costume jewelry industry in Rhode Island.]

The President. I don't know. That's the straight and honest answer. But let me tell you what I have tried to do, and I think the American business community would support me in this assertion.

Our administration has really tried to do two things in the area of trade. We've tried to open up more trade, recognizing it would subject our people to more competition, but we'd be able to sell more things abroad, because we know that's what we have to do, at the same time enforcing our trade laws more vigorously. And I've gotten a lot of criticism for it. I've gotten criticized for enforcing our trade laws against Japan, for example, the disputes we've had there, and some of the other countries we've had disputes with. But I think that is very important.

The second thing I think we have to do is to move to a situation where, over a period of years, these international trade rules begin to take into account our obligations to the environment and our obligations to the working people of each of our countries.

Now, we can't immediately rewrite the rules for all other countries. And we shouldn't tell other people how to live and what rules they

ought to have. But we all do ultimately breathe the same air and share a common environment. And if the United States or, for example, there are other countries that may do more on the environment than we do, if these countries are to do well in the global economy, we must at least be moving toward some common accords on environmental standards and ultimately on labor standards. The United States has begun to put these issues in the national debate. When we made the trade agreement with Mexico, the first trade agreement ever, ever in history that had environmental standards in it, it had never been done before. So we are beginning to do that. Meanwhile, we are going to try to firmly enforce our own trade laws.

The reason I said I don't know is, I don't know enough about your industry, I'm sorry to say, to make a comment. But I will look into that.

Thank you.

Ms. Casey. Mr. President, when there are other countries that underprice what it costs for people to manufacture an item here in the United States, countries that don't have to pay health insurance or any other kind of benefits or meet any OSHA requirements or EPA standards, won't business naturally go to where the cheapest widget is?

The President. Some will and some won't. But that's always been the case. That is, if you go back to the whole history of America, first of all, jobs moved from one part of our country to another because of labor costs. Then jobs moved from one sector of the country into another. We used to have a whole lot of people working in agriculture, for example. Now, less than 3 percent of our people can produce enough food to feed all of us and half the world to boot. So they have to find other things to do.

The same percentage of our wealth today comes from manufacturing as it did 15 years ago. But fewer people do it because fewer people can make more output in manufacturing. So we're in this constant struggle to create more new jobs than we're losing. And what's happened in the last 20 years for the first time ever—at least since we've been charting these things—we've been creating new jobs, but they're not better than the ones we're losing. That had not happened to us before. And that's why average wages have been stagnant in the

country for 20 years. Some are better, but some are not.

So what my challenge is is to identify the new technologies of the 21st century, make sure we are targeting investments on those technologies, make sure we are educating and training our people for those jobs, and make sure that the jobs we create are (a) as numerous and (b) better than the jobs we're losing. That is the great test of keeping the middle class alive in America. It's very hard to do, but we're trying to be on the path to do it. I think we're doing the right things.

Defense Conversion

[A General Dynamics electric boat division worker asked about the Sea Wolf submarine program and retraining for defense workers.]

The President. First of all let me say, as you know, I supported, against a lot of opposition, doing the second Sea Wolf and to try to keep the electric boat company going and also because we're going to move in—we're going to have a transition, if all goes as planned, into a different submarine. In other words, the Sea Wolf was conceived as a submarine designed specifically to counter a Soviet submarine threat. But we believe if we keep working with the Soviets to reduce, the nuclear problems will not be there. We also, however, know we will need a newer, smaller, lighter, faster, different submarine to take us into the 21st century. So I do think there will be defense work in the submarine industries.

Q. Will we survive that curve, through?

The President. Well, that's why I wanted to do the second Sea Wolf. I'm trying to make sure you do get to the curve.

The second thing we're attempting to do is to—we're spending several hundred million dollars a year now working with defense contractors and their workers to try to help develop other things they can do for a living, again, in high technologies that will be there 10 years from now, so that they can earn the same or greater wages.

Mr. White. They are uniquely skilled, so you are more able to adapt to a certain thing, and you would lose that by going away—

The President. That's right. But I've been amazed, frankly, at the number of adaptations that a lot of these defense corporations are coming up with. I realize it's harder in boat manu-

facturing, maybe it is some sort of electronic circuitry, for example, or other kinds of weapons manufacturers. But we are working very hard on that.

We've got this advanced technology project where the Government basically funds, on a competitive basis, proposals by defense industries to convert to domestic nondefense purposes. And so far the results of the last year and a half have been incredibly encouraging to me. I can't say there will be a solution for every problem, but I'm confident that we're moving in the right direction on it.

[The participant expressed his support for retraining programs.]

The President. I think we have to do that, too. Let me say, I have been twice now on a program that the Secretary of Labor sponsored, Bob Reich, from Massachusetts, who believes that some people will just have to retrain for other high-tech jobs. And one of the people in the program is a 59-year-old—this is another reason I don't want discrimination against older workers in health care premiums—a 59-year-old Bell Lab employee who lost his defense job and had to retrain at 59 and got a job working in a hospital at more or less the same level because he was able to do a lateral transfer through a high-tech training program.

And I think that's going to be very important, because you're right, not every industry will be able to modify its own business. So some of the workers will have to try to get lateral transfers.

Civil Rights

[A commissioner with the New England Hispanic civil rights commission asked about civil rights policy.]

The President. Well, if you look at—first of all let me say, we don't have time to go into the specifics, so if you will write me a specific letter, I will give you a specific answer. But I want to mention one thing in particular. Last year, the Civil Rights Division of the Justice Department was much, much more active in many areas than it had been in the past. The civil rights activities of the Department of Housing and Urban Development under Henry Cisneros dramatically increased last year over what they had done for years in the past. And then I appointed Deval Patrick, who's a very

distinguished civil rights lawyer, to be head of the Civil Rights Division. And most people who had been following it believe that we have dramatically increased the activism of the division.

But I can't respond to any specific concerns you have, sir, but if you will write them to me, I will get back to you on the specifics, because I intend to be very vigorous in this area. And my impression, just looking from the statistics, and I've gotten reports from the Civil Rights Division of the Justice Department and on the Housing and Urban Development, is that we have dramatically increased our civil rights activities, which is what I had intended to do. And so if there are problems, I'll fix them if you will get them to me.

Hillary Clinton

[A participant expressed his support for Hillary Clinton for President in the year 2000.]

The President. First let me say that I'm sure my wife would be flattered by your attention.

Q. President Clinton, I started this 2 months ago.

The President. I just—by the way, I just talked to her on the phone right before I came in. She is in South Africa with Vice President and Mrs. Gore for the inauguration of Nelson Mandela. And she's a wonderful person with enormous ability. But she has always told me that she never thought she would ever seek elected office.

Q. Yes, she would. [Laughter]

The President. And after this life—I'm not sure she would ever—

Q. Mr. Clinton, never say never. You guys are rolling with the punches. Good, keep rolling. [Laughter] You know, they can throw a lot of crap, but you're always—

Ms. Casey. Oh, please, Mickey.

The President. Thank you very much.

Now tell them, I didn't know anything about this, will you? [Laughter]

Drug Abuse Treatment

[A participant asked about treatment programs for drug addicts.]

The President. Well, that involves two activities of this administration, so let me answer you. The short answer to your question is, yes, if we get the whole health care plan passed. That is, our health care plan will cover treatments for alcohol and drug abuse problems. I think

it's very important. And treatment works. I know it does, I've seen it in my own family.

Secondly, this year in the crime bill and in our budget, we have big increases for drug treatment for people who are in the criminal justice system. It's crazy, folks, with such a high percentage of people who get convicted of things because they've got a drug problem, to turn right around and put them back on the street before they've had any drug treatment. It does not make any sense, and it's being penny-wise and pound-foolish, I think. So we're trying to help the States deal with that.

President's Childhood

[A 9-year-old boy being raised by a single mother asked if the President had missed his father when he was a child.]

The President. Well, sometimes I did, too. I missed—and you know something?

Q. What?

The President. Sometimes I still do. But my mother did a real good job, and she did the best she could. She worked real hard every day, and she was a real good mother. And I think I had a good childhood.

And there are lots and lots of kids—a big percentage of our young people in America today spend at least some of their childhoods with only one of their parents. Now, and often-times that's too bad, but that's the way it is. And so what we have to do is be grateful for our parents that are sticking with us and helping us, and never use that as an excuse and just make the best we can of our lives, okay?

Q. Yes.

The President. Good for you, pal. Thanks.

Give him a hand. [Applause]

Child Support Enforcement

[A participant asked about efforts to collect child support payments from irresponsible fathers.]

The President. That's a wonderful question. First of all, one of the biggest problems we've got with deadbeat dads is—sometimes deadbeat moms, but usually deadbeat dads—is the ability to cross the State line and not have enforcement across State lines. So a big part of our welfare reform program is going to be to stiffen enforcement of child support across State lines and to try, whenever possible, just to have an automatic withholding from people's checks once they start missing their child support payments,

even if they live in another State, and to have uniform enforcement. That will have a dramatic impact.

Now, in many cases where there was not a marriage in the first place, we're going to have to have some help from the mothers in identifying the fathers. But in every case where we can, in my opinion, once people start to miss their child support, I think you just ought to have automatic withholding. I don't think people should be able to avoid the responsibility for their children just because they're not in the homes raising them. And I think the more automatic, the quicker it can be, the less legal hassle, the less going to court, the fewer lawyers, the fewer pleading with the judges, the more it's just an automatic system, the better off we are. And that is what we're going to work toward as a part of comprehensive welfare reform.

I can tell all of you that your bills as taxpayers to support women and children on public assistance would be much lower if we had a tougher and more automatic system of child support collection, and I think that's what we have to do.

Q. Mr. President, could I ask you when will this begin?

The President. Let me just say this: We're doing better. Many States—one of the things that we did at home that I was quite proud of was, when people came in to have their babies, if they were single, divorced, separated, we started identifying the fathers then and immediately beginning to process the child support and creating a presumption of paternity that could be only overcome with proof.

I mean, there are lots of things that are being done now in State after State, but we'll introduce our welfare reform bill in a few weeks. And then it will pass in a few months, and then it will become the law of the land. And it would be, I think, a big, big advance. We did some things last year to require the States to stiffen child support, but the big thing is, right now, is you've got so many people crossing the State lines and evading their responsibilities. That's what we have to try to attack. And I think you have to have almost some sort of automatic system to do it.

Education

[A high school student asked about college costs and education funding.]

The President. Let me answer the second question first. We are, this year, even though we're cutting overall spending at home, we're giving more money to education and training programs. The second question is, don't dismiss this national service thing too lightly. Basically, what national service does is to give young people like you the opportunity to work either before you go to college, while you're in college, and in some cases, after you leave, and earn credit, almost \$5,000 a year, against the cost of going to school. We'll have 20,000 young people in national service this year; the year after next we'll have 100,000 people in national service, solving the problems of their communities.

In addition to that, last year when we adopted my economic program, the Congress did, to bring the deficit down, one of the things in that bill that almost nobody noticed was a reorganization of the student loan program to cut the costs of operating it, lower interest rates on student loans, and string out the repayments so that you need never be discouraged about borrowing money to go to college, because now if you borrow money in the student loan program, you say, "Oh, I can't borrow 4 years' worth because I'm going to be a teacher when I get out, and I'll never pay it back." Under the new rules you can now pay that money back over a much longer period of time as a percentage of your income. So even if you're going to take a job that doesn't pay a lot of money, you'll always be able to limit your repayment to a percentage of your income.

So we've lowered the interest rates and made the repayments easier. And that should mean that no one should ever be discouraged from going to college again, even if they have to borrow the money, because they can pay it back in a responsible and bearable fashion.

Ms. Casey. Where do you want to go to school?

Q. URI.

The President. A paid political announcement. [Laughter]

Infrastructure Improvements

[A participant asked about efforts to rebuild America's infrastructure.]

The President. First of all, we have fully funded for 2 years in a row now the ISTEA program, the intermodal transportation program that was

adopted several years ago, to make sure we can push the money out more quickly. Secondly, I have now our people studying, with the benefit of folks from all over the country who are experts in transportation investment, what other options we have, short of some big tax increase which I don't think we can enact, to increase the funding flowing to infrastructure investments, and especially to road and bridge improvement.

These things, by the way, create a lot of jobs in the economy, and they're basically good-paying jobs. And they often go to people who otherwise couldn't get them. And they dramatically increase the society's productivity.

Many of the Asian countries that we're competing with that have far higher savings rates are spending massive amounts of money on fast trains, on new airports, on major new transportation systems. So it's a big issue in terms of our long-term economic health. And I believe—keep in mind we're keeping a pretty fast pace here. I had to work on the economy first and then pass the education programs. And now

we're working on the health care and the crime bill.

Q. A lot of bumpy roads.

The President. A lot of bumpy roads. But I think we will have an infrastructure built to take some advantage of this, but not until early next year in 1995.

Mr. White. Mr. President, thank you ever so much. Unfortunately, we are just about out of time. We want to thank you very much for coming to visit not only Rhode Island but us here at Channel 10.

The President. Thank you.

Mr. White. Our 10 Town Meeting is coming to a close. And we'd like to invite you, Mr. President, if you'd like, to stay behind and say hello to some of our friends.

The President. Thank you. I have very much enjoyed this. The questions were wonderful, and I thank the folks in Springfield and New Haven, too.

NOTE: The town meeting began at 8 p.m. at the WJAR-TV studio. The President was introduced by moderators Doug White and Ginger Casey.

Remarks to the American Nurses Association May 10, 1994

Thank you so much. Thank you for your warm welcome. And thank you, Ginna, for that award.

I arrived a few moments ago, and I remember the first time I ever heard your president speak. I knew that she had worked for Vice President Gore, and I thought it was so interesting to hear the head of a national association who was speaking without an accent. [*Laughter*]

I want to say a special word of appreciation to your first vice president, Ellen Sanders, who's participated in White House and congressional meetings on health reform, and to Diane Weaver, the president of the Association of Nurse Executives, who cosponsored this breakfast.

I am very proud to share the stage today with all the fine nurses in the executive and the legislative branches whom you have honored. And I thank you for doing that. And I thank them for their service. I also want to say a special word of thanks to all of you and to the ANA for the courage and the vision you

have demonstrated by fighting for health care reform, and the right kind of health care reform, long before it was a hot issue. As you know, the position paper you put out on national health reform probably more closely parallels the recommendations that our administration has made than that of any other professional health care group in the country. And I thank you for that very much.

I want to thank you, too, for recognizing my mother, who worked for 30 years and then some as a nurse and was deeply proud of what she did. I remember when I was a little boy watching her get up in the middle of the night, always starting work by 7 or 7:30 in the morning, always telling me stories that indicated that there was literally nothing in the world more important to her than dealing with a person frightened, in pain, with a caring and effective manner. This award will help to expand the frontiers of nursing in the areas of women's health, some-